

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

INFO OCT-01 CAB-02 CIAE-00 COME-00 DODE-00 DOTE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8452

INFO AMEMBASSY ROME

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VALLETTA 02869

ROME FOR FAA REP

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EINV, EAIR, MT

SUBJECT: MIACO ASKED TO VACATE PREMISES; GOM SEEKING

- ALTERNATE SITE

REFS: A) EMBASSY'S MEMO OF 08/09/78 (NOTAL)

- B) 77 VALLETTA A-35

1. IN MEETING WITH EMBASSY OFFICERS ON AUGUST 31, MR. HARRY M. REICHERT, US CITIZEN DIRECTOR AND PART-OWNER OF MALTA INTERNATIONAL AVIATION CO. (MIACO, A MALTESE-REGISTERED COMPANY MAJORITY OWNED BY AN IRISH NATIONAL) STATED THAT ALBERT MIZZI, CHAIRMAN OF GOM-OWNED AIR MALTA TOLD MIACO OFFICIALS ON AUGUST 28 THAT MIACO WOULD HAVE TO VACATE ITS PREMISES AT HAL FAR AIRFIELD BY SEPTEMBER 15. REICHERT RESPONDED TO MIZZI ON AUGUST 30 STATING THAT VACATING HAL FAR BY SEPTEMBER 15 WOULD BE PHYSICALLY IMPOSSIBLE BECAUSE MIACO WAS IN PROCESS OF REPAIRING THREE AIRCRAFT AND REQUESTED AN EXTENSION TO OCTOBER 15. REICHERT ALSO REQUESTED GOM ASSISTANCE IN LOCATING A SUITABLE ALTERNATE LOCATION AND SUGGESTED A SITE STILL UNDER RAF CONTROL AT LUQA AIRPORT.

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2. ACCORDING TO REICHERT, MIACO OFFICIALS HAD KNOWN FOR OVER A YEAR THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE TO VACATE THEIR PREMISES AT HAL FAR AND HAD BEEN PRESSING THE GOM FOR A CLARIFICATION OF THEIR STATUS. THE GOM DID NOT RESPOND TO THEIR LETTERS UNTIL AUGUST 2 WHEN THE ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY (THE SENIOR GOM CIVIL SERVANT), MR. AGIUS FERRANTE CALLED REICHERT IN TO ADVISE HIM THAT MIACO MAY HAVE TO LEAVE

THEIR CURRENT PREMISES WITH ONLY 24 HOURS' NOTICE. REICHERT ALSO STATED THAT HE HAD PROPOSED THE ALTERNATIVE SITE HE SUGGESTED TO MIZZI (SEE ABOVE) TO THE MALTA DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION SEVERAL WEEKS AGO BUT HAD NOT RECEIVED A RESPONSE.

3. CHARGE CALLED ON ALBERT MIZZI SEPTEMBER 1 TO DISCUSS MIACO'S SITUATION. MIZZI CLAIMED THAT MIACO HAD BEEN REQUESTED TO VACATE HAL FAR BY SEPTEMBER 15 BECAUSE GOM NEEDED ITS FACILITIES URGENTLY FOR THE LIBYAN HELICOPTERS AND TECHNICIANS WHICH HAD ARRIVED IN MALTA AUGUST 30 AND 31 (SEE SEPTTEL). MIZZI STATED THAT THE GOL HAD REACTED MORE QUICKLY TO THE GOM'S REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE IN DEVELOPING A SEARCH AND RESCUE (SAR) CAPABILITY THAN THE GOM HAD ANTICIPATED AND THAT THE GOM NEEDED A SUITABLE FACILITY ASAP. THE GOM SAID MIZZI, HAD ASKED THE BRITISH TO RELEASE SPACE AT LUQA AIRPORT FOR THIS PURPOSE BUT THEY HAD REFUSED; CONSEQUENTLY, THE GOVERNMENT HAD HAD TO ASK MIACO TO VACATE. MIZZI ASSERTED THAT HE HAD BEEN TOLD BY SENIOR GOM OFFICIALS (PROBABLY THE PRIME MINISTER) TO FIND A SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM AND THAT HE WAS DOING HIS BEST TO DO JUST THAT. HE SAID HE PLANNED TO TAKE UP REICHERT'S PROPOSAL FOR AN ALTERNATIVE SITE WITH THE MINISTER FOR DEVELOPMENT IMMEDIATELY AND HOPED FOR A DECISION BY SEPTEMBER 4.

4. ON SEPTEMBER 5, REICHERT INFORMED THE EMBASSY THAT HE
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HAD NOT YET RECEIVED GOM DECISION ON HIS REQUEST FOR AN EXTENSION OF SEPTEMBER 15 DEPARTURE DEADLINE OR HIS SUGGESTION FOR AN ALTERNATE SITE BUT HAD BEEN TOLD THAT HE SHOULD HEAR THAT DAY AS A MEETING OF GOM OFFICIALS HAD BEEN SCHEDULED FOR EVENING OF SEPTEMBER 4 TO DECIDE ON HIS REQUESTS.

5. CHARGE, DURING SEPTEMBER 5 CONVERSATION WITH UK HIGH COMMISSIONER ASPIN ON OTHER MATTERS, LEARNED THAT THE GOM HAD REQUESTED THE BRITISH THAT MORNING TO VACATE THE HANGER SPACE AT SAFI (WHICH IS THE SITE MIACO WANTS) ON AN URGENT BASIS (THE HANGER IS CURRENTLY BEING USED BY THE BRITISH FORCES FOR STORAGE) SO THAT MIACO COULD BE RELOCATED THERE. ASPIN SAID THAT THE GOM ALSO OFFERED TO HELP THE BRITISH FORCES FIND OTHER SPACE TO MEET THEIR NEEDS AND SAID THEY HOPED THE BRITISH WOULD BE ABLE TO COOPERATE AS 75 MALTESE JOBS WERE AT STAKE. ASPIN SAID HE WAS NOT CERTAIN HOW THE BRITISH WOULD RESPOND TO THIS REQUEST, BUT NOTED THAT TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE THE BRITISH FORCES PREFERRED TO ACCELERATE THE TURNOVER OF THEIR FACILITIES TO THE GOM SO THAT IF THEY WERE FORCED - FOR WHATEVER REASONS - TO LEAVE EARLIER THAN MARCH, 1979,

THEIR DEPARTURE COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED AS SMOOTHLY AS POSSIBLE. HE SAID HE PLANS TO MEET WITH SENIOR BRITISH MILITARY OFFICERS SEPTEMBER 6 TO DECIDE ON HOW TO RESPOND TO THE GOM'S REQUEST. ASPIN DENIED THAT THE GOM HAD ASKED THE BRITISH FORCES FOR SPACE AT LUQA FOR THE LIBYAN HELICOPTERS.

6. COMMENT: GOM EFFORTS TO ARRANGE ALTERNATE ACCOMMODATIONS FOR MIACO IS A WELCOME DEVELOPMENT IN VIEW OF THE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 VALLETTA 02869

ABRUPT MANNER IN WHICH THE FIRM WAS TOLD TO LEAVE ITS CURRENT PREMISES. REICHERT IS, NONETHELESS, SKEPTICAL ABOUT THE GOM'S TRUE MOTIVES IN FORCING MIACO TO MOVE AND IS WORRIED ABOUT THE COMPANY'S FUTURE IN MALTA. HE BELIEVES THAT AIR MALTA AND THE GOM MAY BE TRYING TO FORCE MIACO TO LEAVE MALTA ALTOGETHER IN ORDER TO TAKE OVER HIS SKILLED LABOR FORCE AS WELL AS THE COMPANY'S EQUIPMENT AND SPARE PARTS.

7. WHETHER THE BRITISH WILL BE ABLE (OR WILLING) TO OBLIGE THE GOM IS ALSO UNCLEAR. VACATING THE SITE WILL DISRUPT THE BRITISH FORCES RUNDOWN PLAN AND, GIVEN THE WAY THE BRITISH HAVE BEEN TREATED BY THE GOM (CLOSURE OF THE LOCAL BRITISH FORCES RADIO STATION, BANNING OF BRITISH JOURNALISTS, ETC.) THEY MAY WELL DECIDE NOT TO ACCOMMODATE THE GOM. WILSON

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